

Parish Council Report for March 2020

Cllr Graham Bridgman (West Berkshire Council, Burghfield and Mortimer Ward)

A month is a very short time in a pandemic. When I distributed last month's report I thought that the most important bit of news about to break was the announcement of the new Detailed Emergency Planning Zone for AWE Burghfield – how wrong.

From last month's report: "There have been no cases of coronavirus in West Berkshire at the time of writing. Planning is underway for any eventuality". Life has changed somewhat (a month ago, who had heard of Zoom?).

West Berkshire Council and Coronavirus / Covid-19

Coronavirus Act 2020

After being sped through its Parliamentary stages, the Coronavirus Bill received Royal Assent on 25 March.

The Act has huge implications for such things as social care, and there are various sets of Regulations that have come forward affecting all various aspects of public health and local government.

Amongst the changes is s.78 of the Act and the snappily entitled *Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panels) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020* (SI 392), which came into force on 4 April. As anticipated, s.78 and the Regulations allow local authority meetings to be held virtually (and the frequency of meetings to be altered, or meetings moved or cancelled, etc) - local authorities include parish (and thus town) councils.

The Regulations are at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/contents/made>, and NALC has published guidance - <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/news-stories/3232-holding-remote-meetings-3april/file>.

Council Response

Everything at WBC has changed, from the closure of offices with all non-key staff working from home, to the introduction of Gold and Silver Command daily meetings, to the creation of the Community Support Hub (CSH) and liaison with a host of community volunteer groups.

Stay at Home Message

WBC is consistently promoting the Government's #StayHomeSaveLives message and have observed the guidance by closing all council offices to the public, with only a very few key workers attending at any one time. As you might expect there has been a huge increase on the demand of our IT as hundreds of staff are working remotely but all our teams have staff coverage.

Advice Leaflet

An advice leaflet from WBC should by now have been delivered to every household in the district, providing residents with useful information about the local support available from WBC.

A PDF version of the leaflet has been made available on our Coronavirus Residents' webpage (see below) and if anyone requires it in another format, language, etc please contact the Community Support Hub (also see below).

Communications with Towns and Parishes

So far as Town and Parish Councils are concerned, WBC has focused on communicating via Chairmen and Clerks, using a single point of contact in the Building Communities Together team. Communications have concentrated on ensuring that there is a two-way dialogue with the local volunteer groups so that we pick up any issues regarding support for the shielded vulnerable (building

on the list supplied by the Government of those particularly at risk due to underlying health conditions) and those identifying themselves as vulnerable (more about this below).

Everyone reading this will be all too aware how quickly situations are changing, not just day to day, but almost hour by hour. The Council's aim is to keep you, and our communities generally, as informed as can be – so, in addition to traditional media, and emails etc, WBC is using social media increasingly for speed and coverage.

The response from Town and Parish Councils and community groups who are stepping up to this unprecedented challenge has been phenomenal and we are all extremely grateful for their organising local volunteers so quickly. West Berkshire Council is here to help support communities and individuals, particularly if groups become overwhelmed by demand or need guidance.

Other Communications Channels

Last month I gave you some links to our Twitter feeds but there are also a number of Facebook pages which the Council uses, for example:

- West Berkshire Council;
- West Berkshire Community Support Hub Group;
- West Berkshire Community Corona Virus Support;
- West Berkshire Libraries.

The WBC website also contains more about the CSH and useful information for residents and businesses:

Residents	https://info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-residents;
Business	https://info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-business;
Community hub	https://info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-communityhub.

Linked to all of these initiatives is the WBC Customer Service telephone line: 01635 551111.

Business Support

The Government has announced a raft of support measures to assist businesses through this difficult time. For some of our local businesses the pandemic has meant closure, we hope temporary, but for others this is showcasing the resilience of their business model.

The Council decided not collect the April business rates direct debit instalment to avoid unnecessary hardship and a reduction in cash flow for small businesses particularly. It also provides time for business experiencing uncertainty opportunity to contact the Council and for the various business rate schemes to be applied to their accounts.

Information for businesses can be found on our website at <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-communityhub>.

Council Tax Holidays

For individuals in receipt of Council Tax Support, a grant of up to £150 has been applied to the resident's account – they do not need to apply for this.

For those who have experienced a sudden drop in income as a result of the Covid-19 consequences on their employment income, a council tax 'holiday' can be discussed by contacting our Local Taxation team. More information can be found on our website: <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/article/36859>.

Community Support Hub

As mentioned above, the Community Support Hub is up and running and is currently dealing with around 80 phone calls plus emails a day from community groups and individuals seeking support.

The CSH is there to get information quickly to the community groups and volunteers that are helping the most vulnerable members of our community, and to ensure that everyone who needs help gets it.

As also detailed above, one key element of CSH engaging with the community is the new Facebook page 'West Berkshire Community Support Hub Group', designed to get messages out to community groups and volunteers – please *Like* and *Follow* the page so that we get it as widely distributed as possible.

You can contact the Hub on 01635 503579 or email westberksbct@westberks.gov.uk.

Community Groups

The CSH has issued guidance (and will continue to do so) for community groups regarding communications, data management, GDPR, DBS checks, volunteers, etc.

Shielded Residents

The NHS has written to individuals who are in this most vulnerable category of residents - shielding is a term used where one or more residents in a household are at very high risk should they contract Covid-19 such as those undergoing specific treatment for cancer, recovering from transplants, or having severe respiratory conditions etc – a consequence is that all members of the shielded resident's household are in effect in social isolation (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>).

Food Distribution and Shopping

The CSH is involved in ensuring that Government food parcels are delivered to shielded residents and that all vulnerable residents are being supported locally - community groups are doing a superb job at supporting these households with shopping, delivering prescriptions and emotional support.

Prescriptions

We know some of our vulnerable residents are concerned about renewing and collecting prescriptions. In your communities many of you have already found ways to address this. The district's pharmacies are also working collectively on this issue and are responding to the need to increase delivery of prescriptions. Pharmacies are closing at lunch time to clean down premises and catch up on vital administration so please avoid making unnecessary trips over this period.

Community Cash Float

For groups who have registered with the Community Support Hub and who require a float to help manage cash flow while undertaking activities please contact the Hub on 01635 503579 to make an application.

Other issues arising from Covid-19

Rough Sleepers

All individuals known to the Council are being accommodated in hotels and being provided food and support from our housing team. A number of residents in Two Saints have also been moved in to separate accommodation where they shared rooms with others to ensure social distancing can be observed.

Care Homes

We have closed all our care homes to visitors. All our care homes currently have a supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) and more deliveries are due. We are recruiting and this might be an employment option for members of your community who have lost their employment due to closure of businesses.

Waste Collection

Our colleagues at Veolia are continuing to collect household waste and recycling on the usual collection day. To mitigate staff shortages, collection teams are starting at 06:00 so we are seeking to spread the message to residents to have their bins out earlier than normal.

We know that many people at home are using the opportunity to have a good spring clean, but our household waste recycling centres are closed and the waste teams do not have capacity to take away excess waste. Whilst we are currently collecting garden waste, we may have to concentrate on black bin waste if we have staffing issues due to Coronavirus.

Car parks

All WBC open surface car parks have been made available free of charge.

Buses

In line with fully encouraging social distancing, a number of bus routes have been pared back or cancelled. Any key workers who are affected are invited to contact the Community Support Hub where arrangements can be made to assist them getting to work.

Schools

Schools and Early Years providers closed on Friday 20 March, since when a great deal of work has taken place to ensure vulnerable children and those of key workers are cared for during this uncertain time. Where possible, early years settings, including childminders, are open and caring for children.

Excellent collaboration is taking place between these settings and vulnerable families to ensure children are sensibly placed so that parents who need to travel to their place of work can do so more easily. The Early Years team and Family Information Service are helping parents and carers source alternative childcare if their current provision has to close.

In many cases schools are collaborating together to share resources and to enable staff rotas that ensure teachers spend meaningful time away from school. Where needed, School Hubs have been created to ensure that as many children are cared for as possible. Hub centres are currently located at Thatcham Park School, Westwood Farm Schools, Basildon Primary School and Robert Sandilands Primary School. Some schools are accommodating children from independent schools and other neighbouring authorities. Headteachers and leaders are to be commended for embracing this new, challenging role.

The existing School Hub arrangements will continue during the Easter holidays.

Home to School Transport

WBC has taken the decision to refund all those who have bought a farepayer seat on home to school transport for the two weeks from 23 March to 3 April. To qualify for this refund parents and carers will need to complete the dedicated refund form available online: <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/article/36932>. The information needs to be completed correctly as the payment will be made by bank transfer.

A decision will be made regarding the last two terms of school (20 April to 22 May and 1 June to 17 July) once the Government has issued further guidance on school attendance for these periods.

Mental Health Support for Children – Emotional Health Academy

WBC has set up a dedicated telephone helpline for young people experiencing issues and concerns relating to the pandemic - 01635 503587.

The helpline, which is linked to its Emotional Health Academy (EHA), will offer the district's young people self-help support, advice and guidance from trained EHA workers. It came into operation on 6 April, and will be open between 09:00 and 17:00 Monday to Friday, providing an opportunity for children and young people (aged 11 to 18) to express their concerns and talk about issues directly affecting them during the current crisis. EHA workers will use active listening skills to support young people in dealing with difficult feelings around Covid-19 and provide signposting and self-help support for their general wellbeing.

This local helpline is a short-term service and will be available only during the pandemic, to provide 'in the moment' support to children and young people. It will provide access to trained EHA workers who can offer advice and self-help tools and provide support to manage 'low level' problems. It is not

a crisis line and does not replace other services such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

Scams

The Public Protection Partnership (PPP) has seen a surge in scams during the pandemic.

The public should be aware that scams are looking more sophisticated, such as door-to-door officials, calls, texts and emails which look like they are from a trusted source but are in fact fake.

The PPP team has received a huge variety of complaints from everyday goods being sold at extortionate prices and premises continuing to trade when they shouldn't be, to shopping and medication collection services demanding money up front, with no service delivered.

The PPP wants to highlight some examples, amongst numerous others, that are in circulation at the moment:

- miracle cures and vaccines - there are none;
- fake and dangerous Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Coronavirus testing kits;
- home cleaning and health and safety checks.

The PPP's main objective is to protect and support residents and legitimate business through the successful use of information and intelligence, delivering safe and healthy neighbourhood. They have the following advice for the public:

- Never feel pressured into making any decision or contract;
- Only buy goods from trusted retailers;
- Do not pay any money up front and be very suspicious of anyone demanding money up front;
- Never give out any financial information.

The Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) has also warned the public not to open their doors to bogus healthcare workers claiming to be offering 'home-testing' for the Coronavirus.

The nature of scams change on a regular basis and PPP will continue to monitor them and warn the public – please report any issues relating to Coronavirus at: <https://publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk/covid-19/coronavirus-enforcement-form/>.

Police and Crime Commissioner

As a consequence of the Coronavirus Act the PCC elections, which were due to take place in May, have been postponed. Consequently the current Police and Crime Commissioner, Anthony Stansfeld, will continue in post assisted by his deputy Matthew Barber.

In order to further support the workforce during this unprecedented period, Thames Valley Police is keen to hear from officers and staff who have left / retired from the organisation in the past two years and would be willing to re-join on a temporary basis with an expedited return. Specifically, any former officers, PCSOs, Contact Management Centre Officers/Control Room Operators, Detention Officers or Police Staff Investigators are encouraged to get in touch by emailing Covid19resiliencebank@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk.

Other WBC Matters

Willows Edge Care Home rated Good by CQC

Prior to the present difficulties, WBC's Willows Edge Care Home in Newbury (which provides personal care to up to 39 residents aged 65 and over) was inspected by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) on 27 February and in the report, published on 24 March, it was rated as Good in all five domains and judged to be Safe, Effective, Daring, Responsive and Well Led.

West Berkshire Youth Offending Team rated Outstanding by HMI Probation

The WBC Youth Offending Team (YOT) recently took part in a pilot inspection and have been rated Outstanding (with only one other YOT in the country being scored higher). The rating was given by HMI Probation which gave the West Berkshire YOT a score of 34 out of a possible 36.

A4 Improvements

WBC has been awarded £4.5m by HMG to improve worn out sections of road on the A4 between Newbury and Reading - the funding will allow improvements to be made to a road used by 33,000 vehicles every day as residents travel between the east and west of the District. Over the next year almost 16km of road will be resurfaced at a cost of around £6.1m, with the Department for Transport paying for around three-quarters of the project and WBC paying the rest.

Local Matters

AWE Aldermaston and Burghfield Detailed Emergency Planning Zones

In line with changes to legislation, the areas around the AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield Nuclear Licensed Sites, each known as a Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ), have been reviewed. As a result, the Aldermaston DEPZ is unchanged, but the Burghfield DEPZ has been expanded.

This is of particular significance for those living in the Burghfield and Wokefield parishes and also (in my personal view) has considerable implications for the Grazeley project (more below) - the AWE B DEPZ has been greatly increased and now (for example) encompasses the whole of Burghfield and the whole of the proposed Grazeley Garden Settlement site.

The increase in the DEPZ for the AWE B site is not the result of any change in activity at the site, and there is no greater risk to the public than before the new legislation was introduced - the zones were updated because of changes introduced as a result of the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019 (REPPiR 19). The DEPZ creates a definitive area for the Council and other emergency responders to develop a detailed emergency plan, so that those living and working in the area can be protected and supported as quickly as possible in the unlikely event that a radiation emergency should ever occur.

Following an assessment by AWE detailing the minimum area that each DEPZ should be, WBC's role has been to set out the precise boundaries. This is determined by taking into account local knowledge about communities and geographical features. This is the first time that the Council has had responsibility for determining the DEPZs, a role previously undertaken by the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR).

This does not mean that people are any less safe than they were before – it certainly means that more housing needs to be covered by a detailed emergency plan, but not that any of the safety fundamentals have changed.

Grazeley Garden Settlement

Further to the decision above about the revised AWE B DEPZ, the Government then announced that the £252m Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) bid by Wokingham Borough Council has failed – see the Wokingham news item at https://news.wokingham.gov.uk/news/update-on-local-plan-following-government-budget/?fbclid=IwAR3IZ_xqRrH_UDKcmTd9vzbw89IZ42fcZ-yBgl_IPebWuH3iIMBROvNOuQ0.

From the item: “It had been hoped that Grazeley would benefit from funding from the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF), but the Government announced in its Budget last week that the bulk of this funding would go to projects where demand for homes is lower and therefore more support is needed (such as in the north of the country).

“Instead, the government has announced, and has directed our attention to, a new Single Housing Infrastructure Fund (SHIF) that will provide long-term support to housing development in high demand

areas – such as Wokingham borough. At the same time, Homes England and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have reiterated their commitment to work in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council on Grazeley (should it be allocated for housing in the Local Plan Update). A high-level meeting with these agencies will be held this week (w/c March 16).”

In my personal view the failed HIF bid, coupled with the enlarged DEPZ, makes the project questionable to say the least.

AWE and Covid

This from the AWE: *“The government has classified AWE as a critical organisation in the delivery of key defence and national security outputs. This means that a number of employees have critical worker status and will continue to come to work. We also expect to confirm critical worker status for our essential supply chain. Strict measures are being taken on our sites to keep these people and their families safe by reducing personal contact and observing a number of restrictions. Those staff who can work from home will continue to do so.*

“We are monitoring the situation very closely and taking all necessary precautionary measures in line with the latest government guidelines issued by health agencies and other bodies. Our business resilience plans are being kept under continual review as the situation evolves.”

Three Year Highway Improvement Programme 2020/21 to 2022/23

The latest version of the Improvement Programme includes the local road improvements detailed below (subject of course to programme slippage due to Covid-19):

Parish	Road Name	Start Location	End Location	Length (m)	Recommended Treatment
Year 1 (2020/21)					
Burghfield	Ash Lane	Clayhill Road	Sulhamstead Road	409	40mm Inlay/Overlay
Burghfield	Berry's Lane	Junction with Burghfield Road		80	90-110mm Inlay/Overlay
Burghfield	Clayhill Road	Sulhamstead Road	Hawksworth Road	1200	Surface Dressing
Burghfield/Wokefield	James Lane	Hermits Hill	Goring Lane	1690	Surface Dressing
Burghfield	Reading Road Roundabout	Reading Road/Hawksworth Road Rbt	Reading Road/Hawksworth Road Rbt	100	Re-Texturing
Wokefield	Goring Lane	50m West of Lockram Lane	Surface Change approx 260m East of Goodboys Lane	2754	Surface Dressing
Wokefield	Goring Lane	Hollybush Lane	70m East of Hollybush Lane	70	40mm Inlay/Overlay
Burghfield	Auclum Close/Russet Glade	Auclum Lane	End	290	40mm Inlay/Overlay
Burghfield	Field Farm Road	Mill Road	End	622	Surface Dressing
Burghfield	Reading Road	Hawksworth Roundabout	40mph Speed Limit Near RNIB Entrance	825	MilePave Type Inlay
Year 2 (2021/22)					
Stratfield Mortimer	Birch Lane	West End Road	End	165	40mm Inlay/Overlay
Stratfield Mortimer	Briar Lea Road	Windmill Road	End	186	40mm Inlay/Overlay
Stratfield Mortimer	The Street	Station Road Roundabout	Goodboys Lane	1963	Surface Dressing

Stratfield Mortimer	West End Road (incl Mini Rbt)	Victoria Road	Stephens Road	600	MilePave Type Inlay
Year 3 (2022/23)					
Burghfield	Deans Copse Road	Hose Hill	Burghfield Road	2455	Surface Dressing
Burghfield	Fullers Lane	Burnthouse Lane	District Boundary	970	Surface Dressing
Burghfield	Hose Hill	Folly Lane	Deans Copse Road	960	Surface Dressing
Burghfield	Sunnyside Roundabout	Roundabout & Approaches	Roundabout & Approaches	210	40mm Inlay/ Overlay
Stratfield Mortimer	Longmoor Lane (Estate Service Road)	Longmoor Lane	Longmoor Lane	88	40mm Inlay/ Overlay

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6 April 2020